

**TESTIMONY
OF
DEBORAH SHAFFER**

***Before “The House Subcommittee on National
Security, Emerging Threats, and International
Relations,
Committee on Government Reform”***

**Hearing Scheduled For
Tuesday, March 7, 2006 at 2 p.m. Room # 2154**

**Concerning Special Hearing Entitled
*“International Maritime Security II: Law
Enforcement, Passenger Security and Incident
Investigation on Cruise Ships”***

DEBORAH SHAFFER

I am Deborah Savage Shaffer, the mother of 4 daughters, all currently teenagers except for the oldest who is 21 and living on her own. I have been a widow for the past twelve years and am currently a full time Mom.

The reason that I have been invited to tell my story today is because I am a member of ICV, International Cruise Victims, a group that has formed mainly to get the word out to the public, domestically as well as internationally, of the well kept and expertly hidden secret of the criminal activities and dangers that are occurring onboard These Cruise Ships and to educate the public of the Cruise Lines' standard procedures in dealing with criminal or potential criminal problems. We hope education, information, and regulations will give passengers, as well as cruise line employees, rights, security and protection.

In April 2003, I took a 10-day cruise with my four daughters to the southern Caribbean onboard the Carnival Cruise Lines' Legend. I shared a balcony room with my 13 year old and my 15 year old. My other two daughters shared an interior room down the hall. When we departed from the dock, my daughters and I were standing on the balcony of our room, as we slowly moved away from port. I should have been tipped-off that all was not as it appeared, when as we stood enjoying the breeze and sensation of the departure and were bowled over by the strong pungent smell of marijuana. We tried to see where it was coming from, but it was impossible, because of the design of the ship and balconies.

Boarding the ship had taken hours, possibly half a day. It was the most detailed security check-in that I had ever been through and definitely surpassed the airports and airlines, in my opinion. So how did the marijuana get on board? But with the excitement of the day I dismissed the thought. I felt safe, secure, and had no doubt that everyone onboard this ship had to be reputable and of good character. It was not anything that I gave any more thought to. Passing through the intense security measures of the Cruise Line, once on board the ship, I felt 100% safe, secure and trusting. The crew seemed open, friendly and professional. I subconsciously let my guard down. Right away, my kids met other kids their own age and they were all busy running around the ship together.

The first evening onboard, my 15-year old daughter met a young girl her own age and they were hanging out together. My daughter was supposed to be back to our cabin by 10:00pm, but when she arrived I was already in bed asleep. She brought her new friend into the room to meet me. So we turned on the light, her friend sat down, and the three of us talked for a while. Then, they said they wanted to go back to the girl's cabin to watch a video. I told my daughter to be back at midnight. I fell back to sleep, thinking my daughter would wake me up again when she got in... but at 4:00am I woke up, startled that she had not come back. I jumped out of bed, and in my pajamas, I ran down the hall and to Security.

It took about an hour to get everyone moving on finding my daughter, but after giving them a first name of the girl that she was with, it seemed that they only knocked on one door before finding my daughter. She came out of the room rubbing her swollen, puffy eyes. I was very angry with her, but believed that she had just fallen asleep. I asked her what had happened, as she was very defensive. She was over-reacting to my questions, but at that time I had no suspicion that a rape had just occurred.

One or two days later, my 13 year old daughter came to me and told me that she had been informed by my 15 year old daughter and the new girlfriend that the girl's brother had raped my daughter that night!

I then confronted my 15-year-old daughter, but she denied it. She told me that nothing had happened. She became overly hysterical and cried in denial constantly, whenever I tried to approach the subject. I knew by her over-emotional behavior that she was lying, and that something had happened. I took her to the ship's doctor three days in a row, but each time she would become hysterical and deny the rape. Each visit brought nothing but solemn and somber stares from the doctor for as long as I wanted to sit there requesting an examination. He told me that if my daughter is telling me the truth, and if in fact, she is still a virgin, having never had a pelvic exam, that by him examining her, the examination in itself would be violating her and that my insistence of an examination would traumatize her for life.

I had become the perpetrator! The Captain called me in to talk to me on two occasions after this. He told me that we were on "international waters". He did not tell me what that meant. He told me that he felt badly, but that since we have no proof of the rape, there was nothing that could be done. He told me that he has two daughters of his own and that he felt very badly about the incident. The rapist was the friend's thirty-year-old brother, whom was sharing a cabin with her and her younger brother.

I had no one to consult with, no one to turn to. I didn't know what to do. Finishing up the trip on that Cruise was laborious, and for much of the trip I didn't come out of my room. It was one of the worst experiences of my entire life!

I have since learned the true story of what happened that night, as three years of maturity have given my daughter the courage and character to discuss it. After becoming aware of the Jennifer Hagel Smith story and the Ken Carver story, she told me that she was now ready to tell me what really happened on that first night on board the "Legend", after leaving our room to go to the newly found friend's room to watch a video...

My daughter had climbed into one of the bunks and while watching the video she fell asleep. The next thing she knew, there was a man on top of her. The room was dark. She thought it was the girl's father. He had alcohol breath. She told him that she needed to get up, but he wouldn't let her. She started to scream and he covered her mouth, muffling her screams and proceeded to rape her. The next thing she knew, there was knocking on the door of the room and that was when we found her.

She denied the rape, because she thought it was her fault and also because she was embarrassed and didn't want "the whole world to know". She is not sure at what point she realized it was the girl's thirty-year-old brother.

Rape is an earth shattering, traumatizing experience that kills the person that you are, and slowly changes you into someone else...

From that day forward, my daughter has distanced herself emotionally from me. Now, she never shares her innermost thoughts with me. Losing her father almost 12 years ago, and then being raped 8 years later, is an enormous hurt in her whole being that could never begin to heal, until she was able to address what had happened.

I'm extremely thankful to the Hagel-Smith Family and to Ken Carver for coming forward and standing up for what is right, and being brave enough to insist that people listen to the truth. With their efforts and the efforts of other cruise victims, who could not be here today, my daughter has been able to take her first step in the healing process. And as her mother, whose goal in life was to raise her four daughters to at least the age of 18 without being sexually abused, I have lived with the fact that I failed my daughter over these past three years. I was not able to protect her or defend her.

Today, maybe healing can begin for me, as well.

Thank you.

Deborah Savage Shaffer